

DR A. G. GASTON, continued

According to Harold Jackson's 1992 article, **True Grit – A. G. Gaston –20 Years of Black Business Leadership** in *Black Enterprise* magazine, A. G. Gaston was born in 1892 in Demopolis in Alabama's Black Belt in a log cabin built by his grandparents who were former slaves. He developed a sense for business at an early age when he would charge other children to ride the swing in his grandparents' yard. They paid him whatever they had, usually buttons and pins.

His mother moved to Birmingham in 1900 to be a cook for A. B. and Minnie Loveman who were the founders of what became Alabama's premier department store chain. As a young man, Gaston worked a number of odd jobs from selling newspaper subscriptions in Birmingham to serving as a hotel bellhop in Mobile. His first job, after serving in the celebrated all black regiment during World War I, bound him to the near-slavery conditions of an Alabama coal mine. He began selling box lunches made by his mother to co-workers at Tennessee Coal and Iron (TCI) Co. for 25 cents on the dollar every two weeks. Gaston was also running a popcorn and peanut stand in his spare time.

In 1921, Dr. A. G. Gaston founded a burial society, which he incorporated in 1932 as the BTW Insurance Company. Gaston founded the BTW Insurance Company to fill the needs for blacks in the segregated South who couldn't purchase life or burial insurance from white companies.

Just two years after incorporating the BTW Insurance Company, A. G. Gaston purchased a small funeral home from Abe Smith—the Smith-Gaston Funeral Home provided funeral services for Birmingham's black community. Later Dr. Gaston founded several other successful businesses including New Grace Hill Cemetery in 1948. Incorporating a cemetery into the Gaston

Corporation not only filled a need for the black community in Birmingham, it also fit perfectly into his business model. Dr. Gaston believed his companies now cared for the black community from the "cradle to the grave."

In 1970, Dr. Gaston extended his business holdings with the purchase of Zion Memorial Gardens. This cemetery, begun as the Mt. Zion Baptist Church cemetery, contains burials dating from the mid-1800s. Today Zion Memorial Gardens contains approximately 300,000 gravesites on 42 acres. Dr. Gaston died in 1996 at the age of 103.

Before his death in 1996 at the age of 103, Dr. Gaston accumulated a fortune worth over \$130 million and a business empire spanning communications, real estate, and insurance. After raising about \$350,000 in 1957, Dr. Gaston and a group of investors started Citizens Federal Savings Bank, a savings and loan association. His empire includes the BTW Business College, A. G. Gaston Construction Co., the A. G. Gaston Home for Senior Citizens, Citizens Drugstore, Smith & Gaston Funeral Directors Inc., New Grace Hill Cemeteries Inc., Zion Memorial Gardens and Mausoleum, Vulcan Realty & Investment Co. Inc., and BTW Broadcasting Service Inc., which included radio stations WENN-FM and WAGG-AM. Gaston was, by any measure, a heroic figure whose wealth and influence bore comparison to that of J. P. Morgan and Andrew Carnegie.

Since Dr. Gaston's death, the BTW Insurance Company has suffered some difficulty. The Alabama Department of Insurance stepped in and has put the company in receivership in an effort to re-establish it. Several months ago, Brian Powell, deputy receiver with the Alabama Department of Insurance, called Lee Anne Wofford,



NEUBAUER NAMED AHC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Col. John A. Neubauer joined the Alabama Historical Commission as executive director on September 5. A Distinguished Graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, Neubauer's last position involved overseeing a 2400-person workforce as air base wing commander at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery. Col. Neubauer retired in 2005 after 27 years of service.

historic cemetery coordinator with the Alabama Historical Commission, to request assistance with the documentation and repair of the two cemeteries owned by the BTW Insurance Company. Mr. Powell is working with the company to restore the cemeteries so they can continue to be used in the future.

For further reading, we suggest *Green Power: The Successful Way of A. G. Gaston* by Dr. A. G. Gaston, and *Black Titan: A.G. Gaston and the Making of a Black American Millionaire* by Carol Jenkins and Elizabeth Gardner Hines.

ALABAMA PRESERVATION CONFERENCE

REGISTRATION

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

Daytime phone: (____) _____ Email: _____

Organizational affiliation (if any): _____

	NUMBER ATTENDING	TOTAL COST
FULL REGISTRATION Includes luncheon, Friday's awards/reception/ auction, tours, sessions, & workshops (except Better Preservation Boards).		

Regular (received by Oct. 2)		@ \$75	
Late (received after Oct. 2)		@ \$95	

PARTIAL REGISTRATION Events are included in full registration.

FRIDAY LUNCHEON ONLY		@ \$25	
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FRIDAY AWARDS/ RECEPTION/ AUCTION ONLY			
Before Oct. 2		@ \$45	
After Oct. 2		@ \$60	

SATURDAY SESSIONS ONLY		@ \$25	
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OPTIONAL EVENTS Cost not included in full registration, or event requires pre-registration.

THURSDAY RECEPTION		@ \$100	
FRIDAY BREAKFAST		@ \$18	
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS with full registration workshop only		@ \$0 @ \$15	
CEMETERY WORKSHOP with full registration workshop only		@ \$0 @ \$15	
BETTER PRESERVATION BOARDS with full registration board training only		@ \$10 @ \$15	
TOURS with full registration tours only		@ \$0 @ \$10	

Total Registration Amount: \$ _____

CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

☐ First-time attendee

☐ Alabama Trust member

☐ Birmingham Historical Society member

☐ Better Preservation Boards graduate

☐ I receive the Black Heritage Council newsletter *The Advocate*

☐ City official

PAYMENT DETAILS

Make check payable to ALABAMA TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION.

VISA/MC Card # _____

Expiration date ____/____/____

Signature _____

Mail registration and payment to:
Preservation Conference
P.O. Box 2228
Montgomery AL 36102-0228.

FOR ADDITIONAL CONFERENCE INFORMATION CALL DOROTHY WALKER AT 334-230-2665



Alabama Historical Commission Black Heritage Council
468 South Perry Street
P. O. Box 300900
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-0900
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BLACK HERITAGE COUNCIL
ALABAMA HISTORICAL COMMISSION
PRESERVATION ADVOCATE
NEWSLETTER

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Dorothy Walker, Editor
Paul Mohr, Co-Editor

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF PRESERVATION IN ALABAMA AND THE NATION--
ALABAMA PRESERVATION CONFERENCE

Join the Black Heritage Council, the Alabama Historical Commission, and the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation in celebrating 40 years of success at the Alabama Preservation Conference in Birmingham, October 12-14. "A Heritage So Rich: Exploring Public Spaces/ Private Places" is the theme.

In addition to the AHC's milestone, we also celebrate the 40th anniversary of the National Preservation Act. Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation is the keynote speaker. If you would like to meet Mr. Moe one-on-one, join him Thursday, October 12, at a reception in his honor at the historic DeBardeleben House, now home to Cathy and Tom Adams, 2431 Aberdeen Road in Birmingham. The cost for this event is \$100 per person. A separate ticket is required since the event is not included in the full conference registration.

Conference sessions include training preservation boards to be effective; how to repair, document, and care for historic cemeteries; proper archival techniques for personal collections such as quilts, antique furniture, old photos, and church records; and how to lobby for your project or community and build relationships with elected officials.

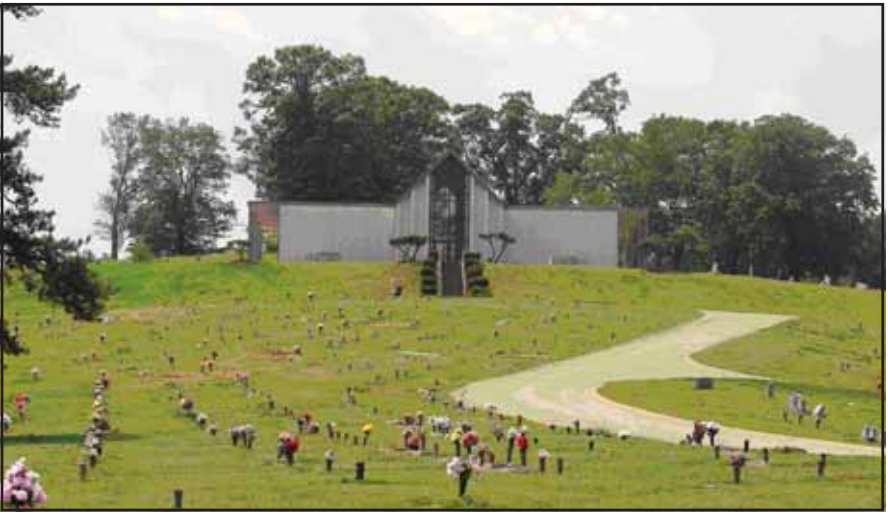
In addition to the sessions, there are several walking tours including the Fourth Avenue Historic District, historically the hub of the black

business district in Birmingham. Total cost of the conference is \$75 and includes all sessions, tours, and meals including a lunch and reception on Friday at The Tutwiler. *TO REGISTER, SEE PAGE 3.*

The conference hotel is The Tutwiler (205-322-2100) \$129 *Alabama Preservation Conference* rate. Registration opens at 7:30 a.m. on October 13 at The Tutwiler located at 2021 Park Place North.

CONFERENCE WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTS
DR. A. G. GASTON, CIVIC AND BUSINESS LEADER

As part of the Alabama Preservation Conference, the Black Heritage Council is partnering with the Alabama Cemetery Preservation Alliance and the Booker T. Washington Insurance Company to sponsor a cemetery workshop on Friday, Oct. 13, from 8:30-11:30 a.m., at Zion Memorial Gardens. The cemetery, owned by the BTW Insurance Co., is the final resting place for Dr. Arthur George (A. G.) Gaston. The workshop will provide information on the documentation, repair, and restoration of cemeteries. Charles Thomas of Eagle Eye Masonry in Pinson, an expert in the field of masonry repair, leads a hands-on demonstration on the repair of historic headstones. *Participants not attending the full conference may register on site (201 93rd Street North) for the cemetery workshop for \$15.* (article continued on page 2)



The mausoleum at Zion Memorial Gardens where Dr. Gaston is interred.

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THE PRESERVATION ADVOCATE has been on a short hiatus. We hope to be back on our regular schedule in the coming months. If you know someone who would like to receive our newsletter, please send name and address to: *Preservation Advocate*, P. O. Box 300900, Montgomery, AL 36130-0900, or email Dorothy.Walker@preserveala.org.

HAVE AN INTERESTING COMMUNITY PRESERVATION STORY OR PROJECT?
Contact Black Heritage Coordinator Dorothy Walker
Phone: 334-230-2665
Fax: 334-230-2664
Email: Dorothy.Walker@preserveala.org

THE NATIONAL PRESERVATION CONFERENCE, scheduled for October 31 through November 5 in Pittsburgh, provides all-important know-how, innovative ideas, and inspiration for people saving America's historic places and revitalizing communities. This year's conference, *Making Preservation Work*, is the premier educational and networking event for community leaders, volunteers, and staff in historic preservation. To request registration information call 800-944-6847, visit the website at www.nthpconference.org, or email the National Trust for Historic Preservation at conference@nthp.org.

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